

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 171: RYAN GOTTFREDSON

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast, a podcast where we discuss strategies and advice for moving up the S Curve of Learning™ stepping back from who you are to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson and joining us today is Ryan Gottfredson, PhD, a professor at Cal State Fullerton and an expert on mindsets. Some of you may remember, he was here for a live coaching episode about 18 months ago.

And you may want to go back and listen to that episode because you're going to be able to see that this is a guy who is a college professor, but he is also a great learner. His topic, it's mindsets. You're familiar with it because of the groundbreaking work of Carol Dweck most likely. It's the idea of a growth versus fixed mindset, the belief that we can change or not. What Ryan is doing in his work, advancing the research is applying these ideas around mindsets to organizational behavior, which basically means he's looking at how our mindsets influence our work lives.

WHITNEY                      Ryan, welcome.

RYAN                              Thank you for having me on Whitney. As you were saying that I was on previously, it's causing me to reflect on how much I loved being on your show before, but also how much has happened in that time. And I don't know how long it's been, maybe a year.

WHITNEY                      Yeah.

RYAN                              And so I'm excited that you're having me back on.

WHITNEY                      Yeah, I think it's going to be really fun for people, especially to go back and listen to that episode and be like, "Oh wow." Like, "He said he was going to do this and he did this." Like, "He said he was going to write a book called Success Mindsets and he did." And so toward the end of the episode we'll, have you share with people, you know, where they can find the book and download it, et cetera. All right, so Ryan, let's get our bearings at a really high level. How did you get interested in this topic?

RYAN

I did my PhD at Indiana university and I, my dissertation was on leadership. And I had been almost always wanting to study leadership and this was such a great opportunity to do so. And it allowed me to reflect and review the last 70 years of leadership research. One of my main takeaways from that review was that the majority of leadership research has primarily focused on leadership behaviors or in other words, what leaders need to do to be effective.

And while I think that that's a good thing to explore, to me it felt a little shortsighted. Leadership is more doing the right things and checking off boxes. It's about being somebody and being somebody that other people want to follow.

I think that there were, we're missing something when it comes to understanding effective leadership and when it comes to developing leaders in an effective way.

One of the most important things for a leader is for them to establish a positive relationship with those that they lead. That's kind of where the mindset stuff started to take off. Because what I learned is that how you develop these relationships with those that you lead is more than just doing the right things with them. That you've got to enter into this relationship, and it requires certain mindsets and motives that actually drive our behaviors.

So in other words, we can do all of the right things, but if we don't have the right motives and the right mindsets, our followers and the people that we lead are going to be able to see right through that and our behaviors aren't going to have the positive impact that we want them to have.

WHITNEY

So you're saying, and this is I, it sounds like how you explain this to someone who says, "Okay, Ryan, tell me about this mindset thing." So you say basically mindset is what you're thinking about what you're doing and it's not just what you're doing.

RYAN

Precisely. And sometimes it's not even that conscious because what's going on is our, our mindsets, our mental lenses that shape how we see the world. And how we see the world shapes how we think and how we behave in the world. And so if our mindsets are off a little bit or, or a little bit more negative, then we're just not seeing the world in the best way possible. And because of that, we're not going to navigate our situation very effectively.

So to get, to bring this to life, let me give you a one of the sets of mindsets that I focus on. And it's the difference between an inward mindset and an outward mindset. So when we have an inward mindset, we see ourselves as being more important than others. And that causes us to see others more like objects. But if we have an outward mindset, we see others as being just as important as ourselves. So their needs and their wants matter just as much as my own.

So, if I'm a leader and I have an inward mindset, our natural inclination is that we're going to think and behave in more selfish ways than if we have an outward mindset. And so, and that's, this is something that our, what we're learning in terms of mindset research is these underlying mindsets are something that our followers can pick up on. That they could see these underlying mindsets and motives and it's that that they are responding to not necessarily the behaviors that we are engaging in.

WHITNEY

Yeah. This is such good stuff. I love this inward versus outward mindset. And we actually had, Jim Ferrell, who's at the Arbinger Institute on the podcast a couple of months ago and they really pioneered, this idea of people versus objects. And I just

think it's so interesting, Ryan. I took your quiz. So everybody, there's a quiz that you can take on your mindsets and figure out, for example, do you have an inward or an outward mindset?

And, I recommend you do it though it is very sobering and humbling, because I had a slightly inward mindset. And I realized this idea of, it's really hard. It's hard to see people as people and not objects when there's things that we're trying to get done. And it can even be something as simple as I think it shows up for me and be curious to see how it shows up for you is when we have a team meeting, it's very easy for me to go immediately to what are the five things that we need to get done today as opposed to how are you, how are you doing? What, what's on your mind? How are your people doing?

And so I think that that's certainly one way, it shows up for me as this. And then certainly we do it with our children, right? How will you, my child, make me look good? You know, how will you sort of improve or increase my, my sense of wellbeing or, or my standing in the world. And so that's some, those are some initial thoughts or reactions that I had to this idea of inward versus outward mindset. I would love to hear what your thoughts are and where you found yourself on the, on that continuum and what are some challenges for you around that?

RYAN

I think that one of the reasons why I do focus on mindsets is maybe in large part because I need as much help with my mindsets as anybody. One of my first questions when I started to dive into mindsets was what mindsets do I need to have and even what mindsets are out there that I even need to consider. And I first went to Google to try to answer that question.

I remember even vividly typing into Google what mindsets do I need to have? And all of the hits were essentially not even talking about mindsets. They were talking about behaviors and with the exception of much of Carol Dweck's work on fixed and growth mindsets. I learned my lesson that Google doesn't have all the answers.

And so what I've done with my mindset framework that I've created is I've just pulled these different sets of mindsets together.

And so I focus on four sets of mindsets. And not to say that there aren't any more sets of mindsets, but these are the mindsets where we have 30 plus years of research, going on. And so as I was learning about these different sets of mindsets, I came to very clearly understand that I was on the negative side of each of these continuums that range from negative to positive. And I think of these four sets, the one that I have historically struggled with the most and probably still do now is this continuum that we've been talking about along inward to outward mindset.

WHITNEY

It's so hard, right?

RYAN

And it is here's the reasons. Across all of these is when we have the negative mindsets, we're in self-protection mode. And, and so let me add a really high level, Whitney, let me give you four desires and you tell me if these are good or bad desires to have. Is that okay?

WHITNEY

Yeah, please.

RYAN All right, so we've got a desire to look good, a desire to be right, a desire to avoid problems and the desire to get ahead. Are those good or bad desires to have?

WHITNEY Well, I feel like it's a trick question, so I'm going to just say it depends.

RYAN Which to a certain degree we're right, right? Because here's the problem with the, well, here's what's going on with these desires is these are very natural desires for ha, for us to have. We are socially incentivized to have these desires, especially if we're leaders because who wants to look bad, be wrong, have problems and get passed up? Well, nobody does.

WHITNEY Mm-hmm.

RYAN But what we don't recognize oftentimes is the negative part of these desires is where is their focus? It's on ourselves that we want to look good, be right, avoid problems and get ahead. Well, when we become so focused on ourselves and fulfilling these desires, we now start to shut down the perspective of others and to weigh in their perspective as a part of our thinking and our decision making. And what we oftentimes don't realize because we develop these desires naturally cause we're socially incentivized, and what we don't realize is that there are higher order desires to have that are associated with the more positive mindsets.

So instead of a desire to look good, we should have a desire to learn and grow. Instead of a desire to be right, we should have a desire to find truth and think optimally. Instead of a desire to, avoid problems, we should have a desire to reach goals. And instead of a desire to get ahead, we should have a desire to lift others. And as we make these shifts in desires which are founded in our mindsets, then we move from being in self-protection mode to being in organization advanced mode and we're just operating on a higher level.

And I just think a lot of people want to be there and they don't understand that there are actually these higher order desires to have. So I don't think people get stuck in self-protection mode because they are these selfish jerks. It's oftentimes because they don't understand that there's better paradigms and mindsets to operate from.

WHITNEY Mm. I like that. I like how you went to the higher order questions. So, on the inward versus outward mindset, if you're interviewing someone, cause you know people will say well how do I know for example, that a person has a more outward mindset that they're thinking about learning and growing, they're thinking about how can I advance our organization? What's a question that you could ask someone to gauge if they're directionally or making progress in the direction that you want them to in terms of thinking more outwardly.

RYAN I love that you're going here with this question cause we got to think about how do we bring in people that have the right mindsets but also at the same time I think it's really important for us to understand that mindsets can change. A lot of times in our selection procedures we want to focus on things that are little bit more stable in general because answers at the interview time period are going supposedly, are going to correlate with behaviors at a later time period.

One of the things that I found as I work with organizations and particularly those that have more negative mindsets, is that even if somebody comes in with a positive mindset, the culture of the organization over time kind of eats away at their positive

mindsets and they start to take on more negative mindsets. And so we just need to be a little bit sensitive about focusing heavily on mindsets as part of the selection process.

But I do think it's really important for us to understand what they're coming in with. And so one of the ways that we could tap into this inward, outward element is, at least one of the ways that I like to do so, is to ask them about how and when they allow the spotlight to shine on others instead of themselves. And, and if we could-

WHITNEY

Mm. Oh Ryan, what a good question?

RYAN

Well, it's just because I think we're just naturally, we want the spotlight to be on ourselves, and even in an interview setting, of course, we want the spotlight on ourselves. And so the pressure is for us to answer with kind of us having the spotlight and we're, I think most of us are maybe naturally inclined to seek that out. But if we can get specific examples where they were willing to put the spotlight on others, that would be a really clear indicator that they're, they can be primed to have more of this outward mindset if in the right situations.

WHITNEY

And what's interesting about that, you said a couple of fascinating things of like you, ask that question and how their mindset is today is potentially indicative of their behavior over time. But this notion that once you hire someone, they come into a system and that system will influence their mindset to be more outward or more inward.

And so we just have to be aware that ecosystem is really going to influence that. And so then if you ask that question, how and when do you shine the spotlight on other people is your ecosystem such that that way, their way of doing that will be possible. And so it can actually give you an opportunity for self-reflection in the process of interviewing.

RYAN

Yeah. And you could see how just by exploring some of these basic ideas do we let the spotlight shine on others or do we allow other people the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them? And because what most organizations found is if our people have mistakes, then our clients leave. And so sometimes we become preoccupied with avoiding problems and avoiding mistakes.

But when we do that, we're simultaneously killing our ability to be creative and innovative. And so, part of when we start to explore our mindsets, we're giving ourselves greater capabilities of being mindful for why we're doing what we're doing and, and when we could get to that place, then we could reevaluate and make shifts.

And, Whitney, I love all of your work dealing with the S Curve of Learning™. Sometimes when we get so caught up, we're at the top of our S Curve and we, we justify that I've got to stay on this because this is where it's comfortable, this is where it's easy, this is where I know I can perform at a really high level. But if we continue to stay on that S Curve, we're ultimately putting a cap on how far we can climb.

And so at some point we've got to jump off of that, the top of our S Curve. And that doing so is such a scary proposition, particularly if we've demonstrated success on our prior S Curve. And, what we've got to do in making that jump is we've got to reset and reestablish certain mindsets that allow us to make that jump in a way that it makes sense for us to do so in the long run.

WHITNEY

Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting. So couple of things are coming up for me. One is just thinking about this idea of the S curve of like, when is it going to be when are we most likely to have an outward mindset and be willing to focus the spotlight on other people, and I would suspect it's when we're in the sweet spot of our learning because we know enough but not too much and we're feeling pretty secure in our role. And so we're like, yeah, I can shine a spotlight on other people.

Perhaps at the top, like you were just alluding to, once you get there, you're a little bit, you know, concerned, or worried that you might not be there for long and so you might get, start to hoard it a little bit and certainly at the launch point when you're trying to establish your footing, the tendency is not to want to shine the spotlight on other people because you want to make sure that people know what you're doing kind of like when you're doing the interview. So does that, does that resonate for you when I'm saying that?

RYAN

Yeah, no. I think it does. And I think as we get into some of the other different mindsets that we focus on, I think those play a little bit of a stronger role in the S Curve, material. I think one of the great things about a focus on mindsets is that we can do anything with a positive mindset and we can do anything with a negative mindset. And so in that, I think in particular when it comes to the S Curve and inward and outward mindsets is we could have an inward mindset at the bottom of the S Curve and we could have an outward mindset at the bottom of the S Curve.

And I think when we're at the bottom of the S Curve, our tendency is to have an inward mindset there. Because we are, we want to get ahead, we want to start moving up that S Curve so we're focused on getting ahead there. And that's indicative of this inward mindset. And what I've had to learn for myself as I've been jumping onto different S Curves is that the speed at which I start to ramp up on the S Curve is contingent upon my ability to want to lift others.

So, the, what I've learned is that the more I try to get ahead of myself, the longer the process it is to start to ramp up the S Curve. But the more I focus on lifting others, what I find is I end up creating partnerships and adding value to the lives of others such that they are now bringing me on and helping me navigate that low part of the S Curve so that I get onto that upward slope a little bit more quickly.

WHITNEY

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think this goes to something that I've been talking a lot about over the last couple of weeks is this idea of create versus compete. And it's exactly what you're talking about, is this notion of-

RYAN

Yup.

WHITNEY

... instead of trying to compete with other people, what are you going to create and what are you going to co-create? And when you're co-creating, you're shining the spotlight on other people. So yeah, I think that, that actually makes a lot of sense. All right. So, let's go to some of these other mindsets.

So, so just talk us through what is a prevention versus promotion on mindset. Cause that's the one that I was least familiar with and I suspect other people are too.

RYAN

Okay, great. And, and it's one that I think is really important for us to be familiar with and it relates to what I was talking about earlier where we're seeking not to fail or not to have problems versus reaching our goals. And so when we have a prevention mindset, our primary focus is on avoiding problems. And when we have a promotion

mindset, our primary focus is on wins and getting towards a destination. If we're a ship captain in the middle of the ocean with a prevention mindset, our number one focus is on not sinking. So we don't want any problems to occur. We don't want to take any risks. Or in other words, we don't want to rock the boat. And this is really justifiable because the ocean could be really scary. But what happens, and while that is justifiable, when a storm comes on the horizon, as it inevitably will, our prevention mindset causes us to want to run from the storm to a place of safety.

We don't want to face these winds or large seas that can put us in danger. And so we end up in a destination that we didn't necessarily set out for, but we were just avoiding the problems. But, somebody who has a promotion mindset when they're out in the middle of the ocean, it's not that they're not concerned about sinking, it's just that their number one focus is on their destination and making progress towards it.

And so when that storm comes on the horizon, rather than run from it, they actually prepare for it. So they start to batten down the hatches and then they become willing to take the risk to brave the winds and the currents of the sea. Because they know that if they want to get to their destination, they're going to have to brave those winds and the currents. And while that may be scary, to them, that's their only option.

And if we look at anybody who's done anything great, they've had to navigate the winds and the storms of the sea and go against the current. And so again, just the, at a high level, the difference here is when we have a prevention mindset, we're focused on avoiding problems, which means we have a tendency to run from challenges. Whereas when we have a promotion mindset, we become willing to brave challenges as a way to fulfill a greater purpose.

WHITNEY

Got it. Okay. That's super clear. So couple of questions there. One, well first an observation on that one, I skew slightly positive. You had said earlier that you skewed slightly negative on all of them, but I'm wondering, has that changed over time as you've done this work? My guess is it would be, it would have shifted on positive.

RYAN

Yeah, for sure. I think of the mindsets, this is the one where I've seen the biggest change in my life. My dad was perhaps the most frugal person I'd ever met. So he kind of grew up at the, at the tail end of the great depression. And he just was the most frugal person I met. And this kind of was ingrained in me. As I started to get off on my own, going to college and, and start my adult life is, there's a couple of things that I was focused on and that was avoiding problems and in the way of, I didn't want to take on any debt.

So I graduated with my undergrad and PhD without any debt. I never wanted to be an entrepreneur because I saw it as being way too risky and I never wanted to put me or my family in a position that, that would be risky. And so this was, this was my mindset and I think I even became a professor because I saw it as being a safe career. I could have good work life balance, yet still do some work that I really enjoyed.

And so I think it, I became a professor largely out of a prevention mindset. And then a couple of years ago, a few years ago, I was given a book, called the Five Minute Journal. Have you ever heard of the five minute journal?

WHITNEY

I have not.

RYAN

Okay. So this is, a book where, and this was handed to me by a CEO and he says, "This is going to change your life." And I was very gracious, in accepting the book, but

in my mind I'm thinking there's no way that I'm journaling. Like, it's not going to happen. Why did you even give me a journal? And so I bring it home and I flip it open and there's three questions that it prompts you to answer in the morning. What are three things you're grateful for, what are three things that would make today great and then fill in some self affirmations.

And, and so I said, I'll give it a shot for two weeks and see what happens. And so I started to do this. And that question in particular, what would make today great or what are three things that would make today great, that just lit a fire in me every day. And I could feel me making the shift from prevention to promotion mindset by doing this. Because what I started to do is I started to ask myself, how do I make today better than yesterday and how do I make this week better than last week, and how do I make this month better than last month?

And then I started to, like, as I started to shift in my mindsets using this tool, I started to become more and more focused on what is my destination and what is my purpose and how do I get there. And that's when I started to see for me, my walls come down. And that's where I said, "Okay, I'm going to start my own consulting business. I'm going to write a book, I'm going to start public speaking." All of the things that beforehand I thought, "There's no way I'm ever going to do these things because that seems too scary and too risky." And now I saw them as being maybe my boat or my vehicle to get to where I wanted to go. So I think for me, this has been a huge shift.

WHITNEY

What I love about that is that all those lessons that you learned from your father about frugality, which are so valuable, now instead of, holding you back, they've just become an anchor so that they kind of make it safe enough for you to go and set sail. So it's so that you've reframed them in a way that is really positive for you because the fact being frugal is a really good thing, as long as it's balanced by, "Hey, I'm going to set sail, I'm going to take off, I'm going to speak, I'm going to write a book." I think that's really powerful. And, and shout out to the author of Five Minute Journal and that CEO who gave you that book.

Is there a question that you could ask in an interview, , that would help you determine if someone is, has a pro, , promotion mindset? Anything you would ask there?

RYAN

Yeah, good question. I think what you want to ask just in general in terms of a general strategy is you want to, you want to get a sense of what they're focused on. Are they more focused on avoiding problems or on reaching goals? And maybe it's how do you respond to a situation with a colleague or a co-worker makes a mistake or has a problem? Like is that something you get really frustrated with or is that something that you try to explore as a way to figure out getting to the purpose?

So another thing to think about is how purpose focused are they and what is their purpose? Because largely at a high level, the difference between a prevention and a promotion mindset is the difference between a comfort focus versus a purpose focus. And so the more that we can ask people about the purpose and the more they have clarity there, I think, that'll help tap into how promotion minded they are. In fact, as I'm saying this, I'm remembering a HBR article that I read a few years ago that said that 20% of all business leaders or only 20% of all business leaders have an individualized purpose for their life.

WHITNEY

Wow.



RYAN And that, that kind of caught me a little off guard because I assumed that percentage would be higher., and I, I think that if in order for us to have a promotion mindset, we need to have a clear purpose ourselves.

WHITNEY So it sounds like if you were to give someone a tip of how can I become more promotion focused, you would say Five Minute Journal and ask your, ask you fit, think about what your purpose is because if you do that, that will allow you to become more promotion focused. Is that accurate?

RYAN Yeah. Let me just add one more thing to that. I think we've got to define it a clear destination. And so part of this is setting goals, could be a destination. And then the purpose, where the purpose in is the purpose is the fuel that we need to take us towards our destination because we're going to start to navigate the winds and the storms in the sea, we've got to have a purpose that will allow us to have the energy to get through that.

WHITNEY One question I forgot to ask you earlier is if we look at the inward versus outward mindset, if you had one tip for people who are saying to themselves, "I want to be a little bit more, have a little bit more of an outward mindset," what's something practical kind of action that someone can take in the next five minutes if they wanted to?

RYAN What helps me the most is asking myself a couple of really pointed questions around that. So I could ask, am I seeing them as a person or as an object? Or I can even simpler if I understand that terminology, am I being inward or am I being outward? And just by asking those questions, we are creating greater, greater mindfulness and it's allowing us to pivot and change our mindsets.

Another question that I love, and I steal this from Brené Brown where she asked the question, do you think in general that people are doing the best that they can? And when I ask myself that question in particular, maybe when I'm frustrated with how other people are operating, then it forces me to step outside of myself and try to answer the question as being a yes. Because when I see others as doing the best that they can, I'm inclined to explore why things may not be going on the way that I would like them to do and I start to become more empathetic.

When I see others as not doing the best that they can, then rather than explore what may be going on for them, I start to be critical of them. And I'm not going to navigate that situation as effectively as I can. And so to me that's a third question is, in general, do I see others as doing the best that they can? And if I can answer yes, that'll get me more towards the outward side.

WHITNEY Oh, really good stuff. Okay. Let's go to the open versus closed mindset. Tell us first of all what that is.

RYAN Yeah. It's simply, how open or closed our mind is to the ideas and suggestions of others. And, what I've focused on this, I've asked myself what leads somebody to have a closed mindset? So they're closed to the ideas and suggestions of others. To put this in, in terms of an analogy, is if we compare our mind to a bucket that people with a closed mindset, and I've been there, we have a tendency to think that our bucket is full.

And so what if our bucket is full? What happens if we start to pour water into that bucket? Well, it just runs off the side and we're not able to absorb any new ideas. So when we think that what we know is best, we believe our bucket to be full. And when we, when we have our bucket full, our primary focus is on being seen as right. So we

want to be the one with all the answers and we shut down new perspectives or different ideas or feedback that may actually be beneficial for us.

Those that have an open mindset is they just leave some room in their bucket. I mean, they still may be an expert and their bucket may have a lot in there, but if we could just save some room in our bucket for the idea that we could be wrong, then it will shift our focus away from being seen as right to finding truth and thinking optimally. And so when we have this open mindset, we're open to the ideas and suggestions of others, we're able to take in different perspectives.

We want to ask questions instead of be the one providing all the answers and we'll see disagreement not as a threat, but it is an opportunity to learn and grow. And so I, to me as I've, that analogy of the bucket has been really helpful for me because at any moment I could ask myself how full is my bucket and am I leaving room for the idea that I could be wrong? And when I do, then that'll open me up to seeing different perspectives from others.

WHITNEY

Yeah. Okay. All right. So a lot of fun stuff here. So I, first of all, and we're going to kind of move around on this is what's a good interview question to ask to gauge how open a person is to new ideas and open to the prospect that they could be wrong? Because of course we will be, but open, being open it. Is there a question that you would ask?

RYAN

How do they deal with disagreement? How, how strong do they put their foot in the sand on an opinion? And so one of the things that is really critical about this that we understand is we can always take a stance. We can always have a stiff back particularly, and we should in terms of kind of our morals and our values. But having an open mindset means that we have a soft front instead of a hard front.

And so rather than having ideas that may conflict with us, we allow them to come in and we just have the capability of sitting with those different ideas. Not that we have to run with them, we've just got to let them come in. And so figuring out how, one's ability to allow alternative perspectives to come in and at least be something that they can consider would be indicative as somebody who has an open mindset.

WHITNEY

So in the, in the interest of us, you know, sharing our experiences, you had said that you skewed slightly negative on this one. I did too. I think it's so, this one I have to say of all of them was the most interesting or revealing for me, I suppose, as I was looking at this, you know, some of the things that are indicative of a closed mindset that really stood out for me is, I'm the expert. I've already thought through this, I'm in charge, I know what is best for our group.

And I think that that's interesting because we do that sometimes, not out of malice. Like we really think we what's best, like really. And, it comes from a caring place. I think sometimes when we think about this closed versus fixed, it can be in this place, at least for me, of sort of arrogance as opposed to the underlying pieces when you're talking to someone, I really do think I know what's best so we, we shouldn't talk about this because I care about you. And if you would do what I said to do then, then it would all work out. And so that was interesting to me.

And the other thing that I love you said, here was that voice equals value. I think that was really powerful. Like if we let everybody have a voice in the room, then everybody has power and therefore we're less likely to be closed to the ideas of people. And then one other thing that I wanted to point out for everybody that was fascinating, and I don't know if you'll bring this up, Ryan, is that the tip.

I'm going to share the tip everybody. If you want to have a more open mindset, which means it's psychologically safe for people to have new and innovative ideas, here's the goal for me, improve your time management. When you are working against a deadline, your mind starts to close. When you have more time and more space, your mind opens. Any thoughts on that, Ryan?

RYAN

So I think the two traps that we, we fall into is, one is we see ourselves as an expert, which makes us inclined to not be as sensitive to the ideas and suggestions of others. And what we got to just realize is that what matters again is not whether or not we go with their ideas and suggestions, but whether or not we take them in and we just validate what they're saying because that needs to happen in order to create that psychologically safe environment.

So trap number one is we see ourselves as the expert. Trap number two is we are, we are in implementation mode. So we're up against the deadline, we need to get this done or focused on getting it done than on exploring kind of options or ideas around it. And the reality is in some situations we have to close down our mind if we are going to hit those deadlines. But at the end of the day, we've got to recognize that there's a consequence for doing that. And that consequence comes in the form of lower psychological safety in the future.

And then also into lower quality products that we're producing, whatever that might be. And so, in terms of that first pitfall is we've got to see ourselves as, as having at least some room in our bucket for, for thinking differently and for the idea that we could be wrong. And then for the second one is if we could get better at time management, then we free up the space to create that psychological safety and then also produce higher quality work. Because we are taking in the ideas and suggestions of others.

WHITNEY

I was just... Ryan, that was just so interesting to me. This idea of, if you will create, if you will manage your time better, you can have a more open mindset. Just making that connection was fascinating, so thank you. All right. So on that one, have you moved also more to the positive over time? Have you found as you've had these learnings gone from a little bit less closed to more closed? I know you said you started less open, but have you found that you've moved?

RYAN

Yes, most definitely. And I think... I don't think I was a closed-minded person. I think I was a very, but I've always been a very opinionated person and, and what I've learned that I need to soften that. So I always saw myself as being open-minded, which I think most if us do, but I think other people saw me as closed minded. And so what I've had to learn is how to soften my stance and how I interact with others. So rather than being the one that's providing all the answers, I've got to start asking more questions.

I've got to do a better job of, of validating other's ideas and really sitting with them in terms of where they're coming from it. And that has, has been a huge help for me.

WHITNEY

Interesting. Okay. Let's go to the final one. I think this is one that most people are familiar with. So Ryan, just talk us through the fixed versus growth mindset. Tell us where you are on that continuum and how, how it has changed.

RYAN

So on a fixed mindset, we don't believe that we could change our talents, abilities and intelligence. When we have a growth mindset, we do believe that we could change our talents, abilities, intelligence. And what Carol Dweck has found in her research is about half of the population has a fixed mindset, the other half has more of a growth mindset.

And when we have a fixed mindset, we are concerned about being a have versus a have not. So we actually see the world that people either have it or they don't.

Whereas those with the growth mindset, they believe that people, if you're not a have now, that wouldn't preclude you from being a have later. And so when we have this fixed mindset, when we see the world in terms of haves or have nots, our primary focus becomes on looking good. Because if we can look good, then that validates us as being a have. And if we fail, then that sends a message to us that we're a have not.

And so when we have a fixed mindset, our primary focus becomes on avoiding failure and on looking good, which means we're going to have a tendency to shy away from problems and difficulties and failure because those might expose us as being a have not. Whereas those are the growth mindset, they're able to see problems, challenges, and failure as opportunities to learn and grow. And in fact, maybe the best ways to learn and grow and to advance ourselves. So at the end of the day, those with the fixed mindset are focused on looking good, those with a growth mindset are focused on learning and developing as a way to better themselves.

Let me give you an example just to bring this to light a little bit.

So my, my freshman year of college I wanted to become a medical doctor. And so I signed up for the leader chemistry class. And it was actually a class that was taught by the guy who invented sticky notes when he worked at 3M. So this multimillionaire that was just loved chemistry and was teaching it in the small junior college. And I took this class and after the semester I got the lowest grade I've ever received. So I got a C grade, I had passed the class, but I never gotten a C before. So to me this was a failure.

And with my fixed mindset I kind of was exploring my options. How do I respond to this? Well because this exposed me in my mind as a have not, then naturally my thinking went, "Well I need to choose a different major that comes more naturally to me so I could be seen as a have." And so that's what I did is I changed my major. And now knowing what I know about the difference between fixed and growth mindsets, what I wasn't able to see at the time was other options that were available to me that would have been better for me to engage in.

So if I had a growth mindset, rather than seeing this situation as a failure, I would have seen it as an opportunity to learn and explore why is it that I got a C? Well, it because I'm a have not, or probably more accurately is it because my study habits aren't very good and that I need to dedicate more time? That becoming a doctor is not going to be easy that you've got to put in the time and the effort.

And so now looking back on this, I think that would have been a much more effective way to respond to that situation, is by introspecting about what I could learn from the situation as opposed to just giving up and trying something else.

WHITNEY

Such a great story. But you did become a doctor. You just came, became a different kind of doctor.

RYAN

A different doctor, yup.

WHITNEY

Right. And, and I do think you know, you, you bring up this important point is I think when you're on the launch point of the S Curve, this is a mindset that becomes really important because when you're at the top of a curve, you're like, "Yes, I can do

something different. I'm going to take this class," and you've got this sort of growth mindset. But then once you find yourself in the middle and the muck of being at the launch point, that question, can I really do this, am I really capable of, of having this? Starts to kick in. And so that's where we need to cultivate that, that growth mindset.

RYAN

Well, just build on that. And I would just really be interested in your perspective on this because one of my thoughts on this is that I just wonder if people that have a fixed mindset have a harder time jumping onto a new S Curve than those with a growth mindset. Because when we are up the top of our curve, we are excelling and it's really easy to see us as a have.

And, the idea of jumping onto a new S curve, we're putting ourselves in a position where we're really kind of probably going to feel like a have not. Like things are new to us, and this is going to be a struggle. We're really going to feel out of our element. So one of my thoughts, and again I, I'd just be open to your perspective on this is does having a fixed mindset prevent people from jumping on to a new S Curve?

WHITNEY

Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. And so they, you become very prevention focused, you've got that fixed mindset. And so one of the things you have to do is you've got to have the, you've got to find a way to have the, prevention focus, say to yourself, what am I going to lose if I stay here? So flip it on itself. And then also ask yourself, okay, well if I don't, basically if I don't disrupt myself, if I don't do something different, what's going to happen? What bad thing will happen to me?

And so if you struggle with a fixed mindset, if you struggle with a prevention focused mindset, you've got to flip it. And we all do, by the way, just to varying degrees, you've got to flip it. And that will help the people who aren't promotion-focused, who aren't naturally have a growth mindset allows you to get over, get into that place where you're willing to make that jump or make that leap.

RYAN

Yeah, I love that. And as you're saying that, one of the thoughts is, I think a lot of times those that have a fixed mindset, they're really focused on looking good. And one of the reasons for that is because they don't want to be judged and they don't want to be judged negatively. And when we jump, when we're at the top of our S Curve, we're probably being judged positively. And the idea of jumping down another S Curve is we're opening up the idea that we could be judged negatively. And, and we've got to figure out ways in which we got, we can be okay with that if we want to continue to advance.

WHITNEY

So where can people find you? Take this mindset quiz that I think everybody's going to want to take. And you also have a book that you were talking about 18 months ago and now you have that book. So just tell us a little bit of how people can take the quiz and how they can get your book.

RYAN

Yeah. The best place to go is my website, [Ryangottfredson.com](http://Ryangottfredson.com). And there you could take the mindset assessment for free, it's only 20 questions. It'll take you about five to seven minutes to take it and then you can also get my book there. Eighteen months ago when we talked, it was kind of a dream and now it's becoming a reality.

WHITNEY

Oh, congratulations. That's wonderful. Oh, so good. Okay. Any final tips or advice that you have for us?

RYAN

Well, I think that I've heard it said that mindsets are the secret to success. And, and I'm not sure if that's the case. Well, I believe that mindsets are really important for success,

but I don't know if that's necessarily a secret. I think what is a secret for most people is what mindsets we need to have to be successful. And I think that in our conversations, we've started to answer that question.

We haven't provided all of the answers to that, but I think as a whole, if people want to develop themselves and if they want to develop their organizations in the most effective ways possible, they've got to add mindsets to the equation. I really hope people will now add mindsets to the equations of all of the frameworks that they're currently using and to the degree to which we do so, I think we'll get even more out of the frameworks that we're using.

WHITNEY

Ryan Gottfredson, thank you very much for being with us and congratulations on all of your moving up this S Curve that you took the risk and jumped to, very exciting. Again, thanks for being here.

RYAN

Yeah, thanks for having me on. And thanks for all your support Whitney.

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We've talked a lot over the past few months about remaining calm in the midst of chaos. This involves managing your mindset. It is foundational to personal disruption.

If you recognized yourself and some of your patterns as you listened to our conversation, I'd encourage you to go take Ryan's quiz. For me, having this lens through which to view myself has been helpful as I move up various S Curves of Learning. We have the link in the show notes - visit [whitneyjohnson.com/podcast](http://whitneyjohnson.com/podcast) if you'd like to take the quiz too.

The most delightful thing about this conversation was hearing about what Ryan is creating--how he continually disrupts himself. He and I did our live coaching podcast 18 months ago, and to hear the progress that has been made is thrilling. When Carol Kauffman, founder of the Institute of Coaching at Harvard Medical School, was on the podcast in Episode 118, she said that "in coaching, you follow the trail of dreams to help a person live the life they want."

That's one of the best parts of being a coach--we get to help people follow their trail of dreams. Like here on the podcast. Like in the live coaching workshop we just wrapped. And like we are going to do a new program we are working on. Those who are part of our newsletter will hear about it first, so if you don't receive our newsletters on Thursdays, visit [whitneyjohnson.com/newsletter](http://whitneyjohnson.com/newsletter) and get signed up.

Thank you again to Ryan Gottfredson for being our guest, thank you to sound engineer Whitney Jobe, producers Melissa Rutty and Macy Robison, manager Sarah Duran, and content contributors Virginia Kivlighan, Jennifer Richardson and Nancy Wilson.

I'm Whitney Johnson  
And this is Disrupt Yourself.